

Austin American-Statesman

COMMENTARY: WHY WE CHEAT YOUNG PEOPLE — AND U.S. ECONOMY — BY ENDING DACA

Special to the American-Statesman

May 29, 2018

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I am a lifelong Republican. I believe in the rule of law. I pay my taxes. I love my country.

And I am utterly at a loss as to why we are fighting about DACA, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. With all the other problems we are facing as a state and a nation, fanning divisive passions over the fate of law-abiding young people who contribute to our economy seems like a distraction and a waste of public resources.

Let us first review all that DACA does not do. It does not provide amnesty to anyone. It does not grant citizenship to anyone — or even a path to citizenship. It does not make any special provisions or offer any special protections for anyone who crossed illegally into the United States as an adult. Because it applies only to individuals who were already here when the program took effect in 2012 — and can prove it — it also does not create an incentive for more illegal crossings.

What the program does do is say to young people who were children when they were brought here that as long as you register, follow our rules and make yourself useful, we will hold off on any enforcement action against you until we can sort out the mess that our immigration system has become.

This strikes me — along with the rest of my colleagues on the [Texas Business Leadership Council](#) — as a pragmatic solution to a real-world problem. Many people who talk about DACA seem to want to debate whether it is fair to punish children for the sins of their parents — or who we should be letting into the country. Those are fine philosophical discussions, but they miss the larger reality that the “Dreamers” are already here — all 800,000 of them, plus a few hundred thousand more who are eligible for the program but haven’t registered. Removing them would hurt all of us.

This is especially true in Texas, where roughly one in six DACA-eligible young people live. Surveys show that more than 90 percent of these individuals are employed, with annual earnings in Texas alone topping \$3 billion. That works out to more than \$250 million in state and local taxes paid by DACA-eligible workers every year, with nearly \$220 million more going to the federal government.

The DACA population in Texas doesn’t just contribute as taxpayers; they spend big as consumers. Economists place

their annual buying power at more than \$2.5 billion, the highest in any state except California. Sending them “home” — back to a place that many of them cannot remember and with a language many cannot speak — would leave a multibillion-dollar hole across state businesses that depend on paying customers, like restaurants, shops and entertainment venues.

You know what else DACA-eligible young people do? They start businesses — and they do it at a rate that far surpasses their native-born peers. In Texas, the percentage of self-employed U.S.-born workers between the ages of 16 and 34 is 4.1 percent. That figure jumps to 5.4 percent for DACA-eligible young people.

It’s not just that DACA youth are already here and contributing money into public coffers — money that will have to come from somewhere else if not from them. It’s that we have already invested in them. They went to school right here in Texas, public schools funded by our taxpayer dollars.

I don’t know about you, but if I found out that I paid for something — or someone — without meaning to, and the person on the receiving end said that they would like to stick around and try to pay me back, I’m not inclined to reject that offer. The only thing more wasteful than educating another nation’s children is sending them “home” after doing so.

We need a sensible fix to our immigration system and strong borders. Ending DACA is not sensible, and it will not make us strong. Let’s focus our efforts on the real issues.

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